

We claim:

1. A process for preparing methylamines by gas-phase reaction of methanol and ammonia as starting materials at a pressure in the range from 15 to 30 bar in the presence of a heterogeneous catalyst, which comprises vaporizing the starting materials in one or more heat exchangers (1, 2, 3), superheating them to form a feed gas stream and subsequently feeding this into a reactor (4), with the starting materials either being mixed in the feed stream to one of the heat exchangers (1, 2, 3) or at any other position on the heat exchanger (1, 2, 3), and taking off a product gas stream comprising monomethylamine, dimethylamine and trimethylamine and also reaction by-products from the reactor (4), wherein the reactor inlet temperature of the starting materials is controlled to a temperature in the range from 360°C to 370°C by passing part or all of the feed gas stream or product gas stream through an adjustable valve (5) in order to vary the pressure.
2. A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the valve (5) can be adjusted steplessly.
3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the valve is installed upstream or downstream of the reactor.
4. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the product gas stream is used for vaporizing and superheating the starting materials, resulting in partial condensation of the product gas stream.
5. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, wherein a substream of the product gas stream is used for vaporizing and superheating the starting materials.
6. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5, wherein the reaction by-products formed in the reaction are separated off from the product gas stream and fed back into the reactor (4).
7. A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the ammonia and the reaction by-products fed back into the reactor (4) are preheated before the methanol is added.

8. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 7, wherein steam is added to the product gas stream to preheat and superheat the starting materials.
9. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 8, wherein the reactor
5 (4) is operated adiabatically.
10. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 8, wherein heat of reaction is removed by cooling the reactor (4).
- 10 11. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 10, wherein, when a plurality of heat exchangers (1, 2, 3) is used for vaporization and superheating of the starting materials, a droplet precipitator (6, 7) for separating condensate from the product gas stream is installed downstream of each heat exchanger (1, 2, 3).
- 15 12. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 11, wherein the pressure at the inlet of the valve is from 0 to 5 bar higher than at the outlet of the valve.
13. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 12, wherein the starting materials are heated up electrically to start the reaction.
20
14. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 13, wherein vaporization and susperheating of the starting materials is carried out in countercurrent.
- 25 15. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 13, wherein vaporization and superheating of the starting materials is carried out in cocurrent.
16. A process as claimed in one or more of claims 1 to 13, wherein, when a plurality of heat exchangers (1, 2, 3) is used for vaporization and superheating of
30 the starting materials, at least one heat exchanger (1, 2, 3) operates in cocurrent and at least one heat exchanger (1, 2, 3) operates in countercurrent.